

Attila Vértes (1934–2011), famous Hungarian nuclear chemist and educator dies

Attila Vértes, renowned radiochemist, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, distinguished professor of the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, author of over 500 original scientific papers, editor of numerous science monographs, outstanding science organizer, everyone's Attila died on 31 December, 2011.



Born in Túrje, Hungary, 1934 Attila Vértes received his M.S. degree in chemistry at the Technical University Budapest in 1958. He earned his second M.S. degree in Economy in 1962 from the University of Economics, Budapest. Having had joined the Department of Radiochemistry of the Lomonosov (Moscow State) University, he was awarded the Candidate of Sciences (PhD) degree by the Soviet Academy of Sciences in 1965. He received the Doctor of Science degree of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1973 for his thesis entitled "Mössbauer studies of the chemical structures of solutions". Attila Vértes became a Corresponding, then an Ordinary Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1993 and 1998 for his inaugural addresses on positronium chemistry and Mössbauer spectroscopy of coordination compounds, respectively. In 1974, he became professor in chemistry at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. He headed the Department of Nuclear Chemistry of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest from 1983, and the Research Group of Nuclear Methods in Structural Chemistry of the Academy from 1996 until his retirement in 2004. He continued his teaching and research activities as Professor Emeritus at the same university.

He had been a visiting scientist at the University of Newcastle, a Humboldt Fellow at the Technical University Munich (Germany) as well as a guest professor at Lehigh University, Bethlehem (USA), Tokyo University (Japan) and at Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz (Germany).

Since the very beginning of his career, Professor Vértes was much interested in the interaction of nuclear radiation with matter, focusing his activities on Mössbauer spectroscopy and positron annihilation spectroscopy. In Mössbauer spectroscopy, he substantially contributed to obtain significant experimental data and to elucidate hyperfine interactions of iron, tin and europium in alloys, composite materials, biomolecules, inorganic salts, organometallic and coordination compounds, as well as high-temperature superconductors. Remarkable are his contributions to the understanding of the complex formation and equilibria in aqueous and non-aqueous solutions.

He was great in disseminating excellent scientific ideas. Besides being an outstanding scientist, Attila Vértes was an outstanding organizer. He established a large number of scientific collaborations.

His significance and position in the scientific community was recognized by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences by his becoming chair of the Division of Radiochemistry (1993–2002), and that of numerous domestic and international conferences. From 1980 to 1988, he was a member of IBAME, the International Board on the Applications of the Mössbauer Effect and held editorial spots on some of the international journals in the field.

He received the title of Honorary Doctor of Glasgow Caledonian University (U.K.) in 1996. He was awarded the Széchenyi Prize in 2001 and the George Hevesy Medal Award in 2004.

Professor Vértes co-authored more than 500 scientific papers in international journals on topics of nuclear and radiochemistry, radiation chemistry and physics, chemical physics, inorganic chemistry, solid-state chemistry and physics, electroanalytical and materials chemistry. He also made over 280 presentations at international conferences. As a member of the Mössbauer Century Club, he had the distinct honor of having the highest number of publications (503) amongst the Mössbauer spectroscopists. He is author and editor-in-chief of 10 monographs and textbooks in the field of nuclear and radiochemistry, including the voluminous Handbook of Nuclear Chemistry (Springer, 2003 and 2011). His valuable Textbook on Nuclear and Radiochemistry (Elsevier, The Netherlands, 1987) is used extensively in university courses.

Professor Vértes was a great educator and established a school in nuclear chemistry. He consistently promoted young scientists, starting their career by creating appropriate positions and funds and by helping them to attend schools, courses. Professor Vértes was a demanding but inspiring teacher. Many chemists and physicists considered him not only a valued colleague but also a dear friend and a mentor. His students and followers have spread all over the globe.

He had an open and charming personality free from formalities. Professor Vértes was addressed or mentioned by his first name Attila not only by his friends but by all colleagues and acquaintances around the entire world. Attila was an exceptionally warm and unpretentious person, with old-world grace and a good sense of humor. He was a loving husband to his wife Irén, a father to his sons Attila and Csaba, and a proud grandfather of Csaba Jr.

Dear Attila, your warm character and sincere attitude shall never be forgotten.

Ernő Kuzmann